

MATSYA

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Illustrator Sigrun Srivastava

ISBN 978-81-237-2579-6

First Edition 1985

Fourth Reprint 2002

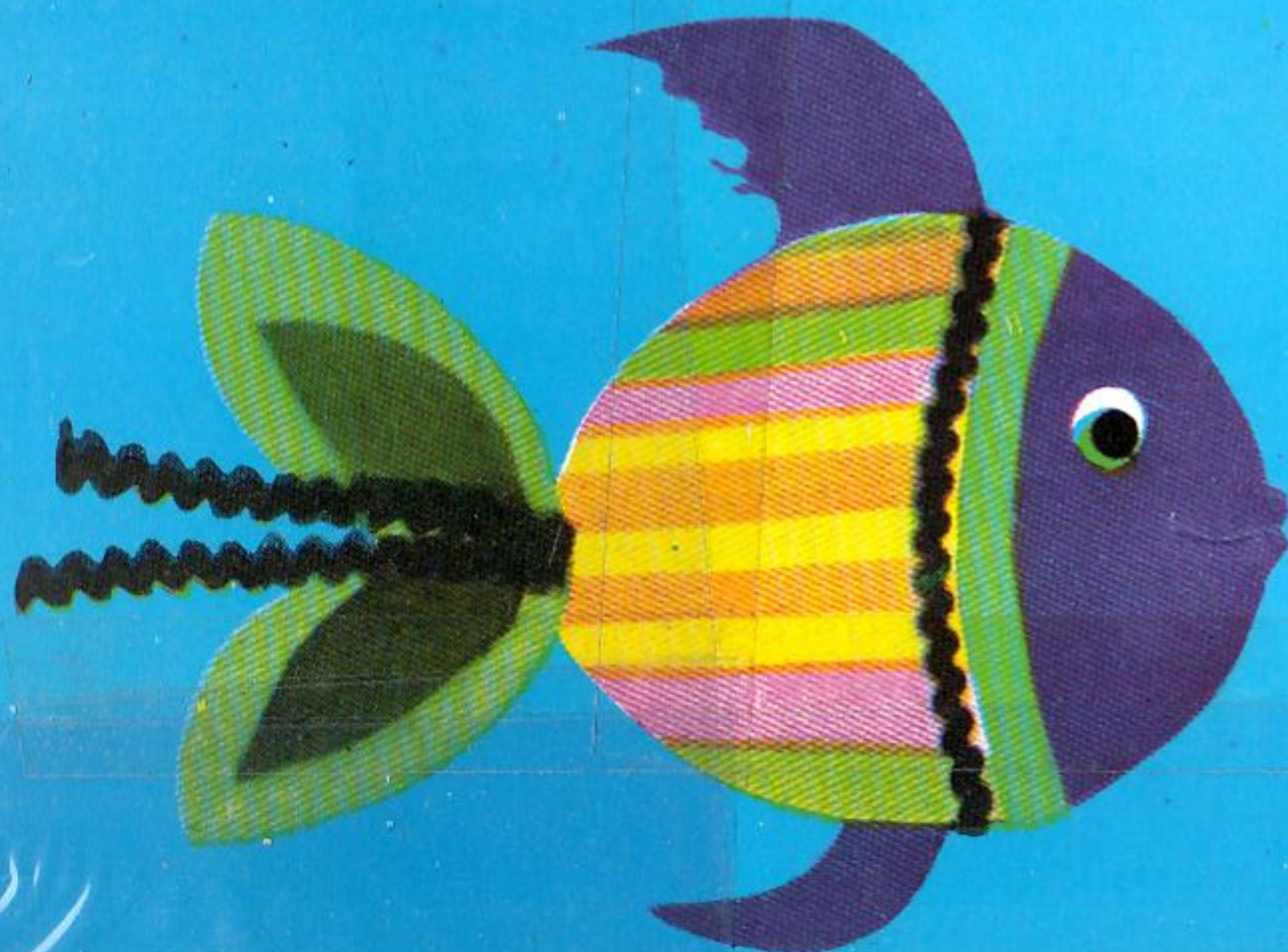
Fifth Reprint 2005

Sixth Reprint 2007 (*Saka* 1929)

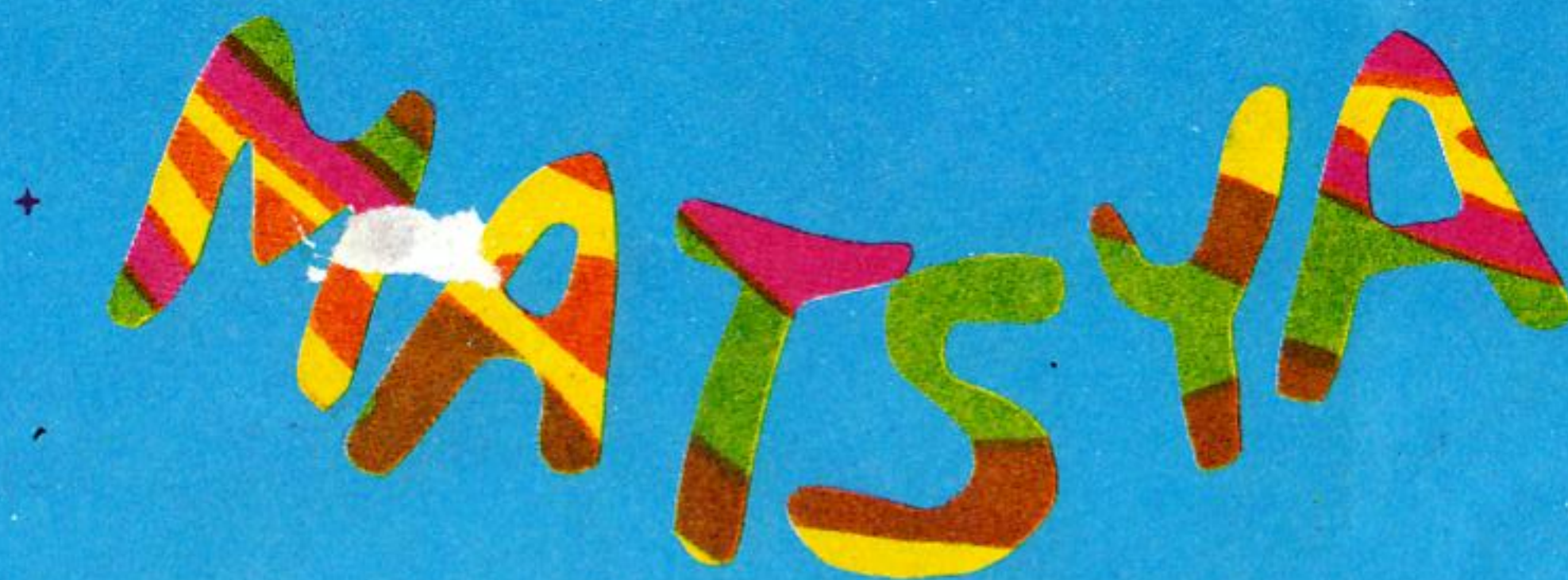
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Rs 19.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
A-5 Green Park, New Delhi-110 016



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya



The Beautiful Fish

Shanta Rameshwar Rao

Illustrator :
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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA



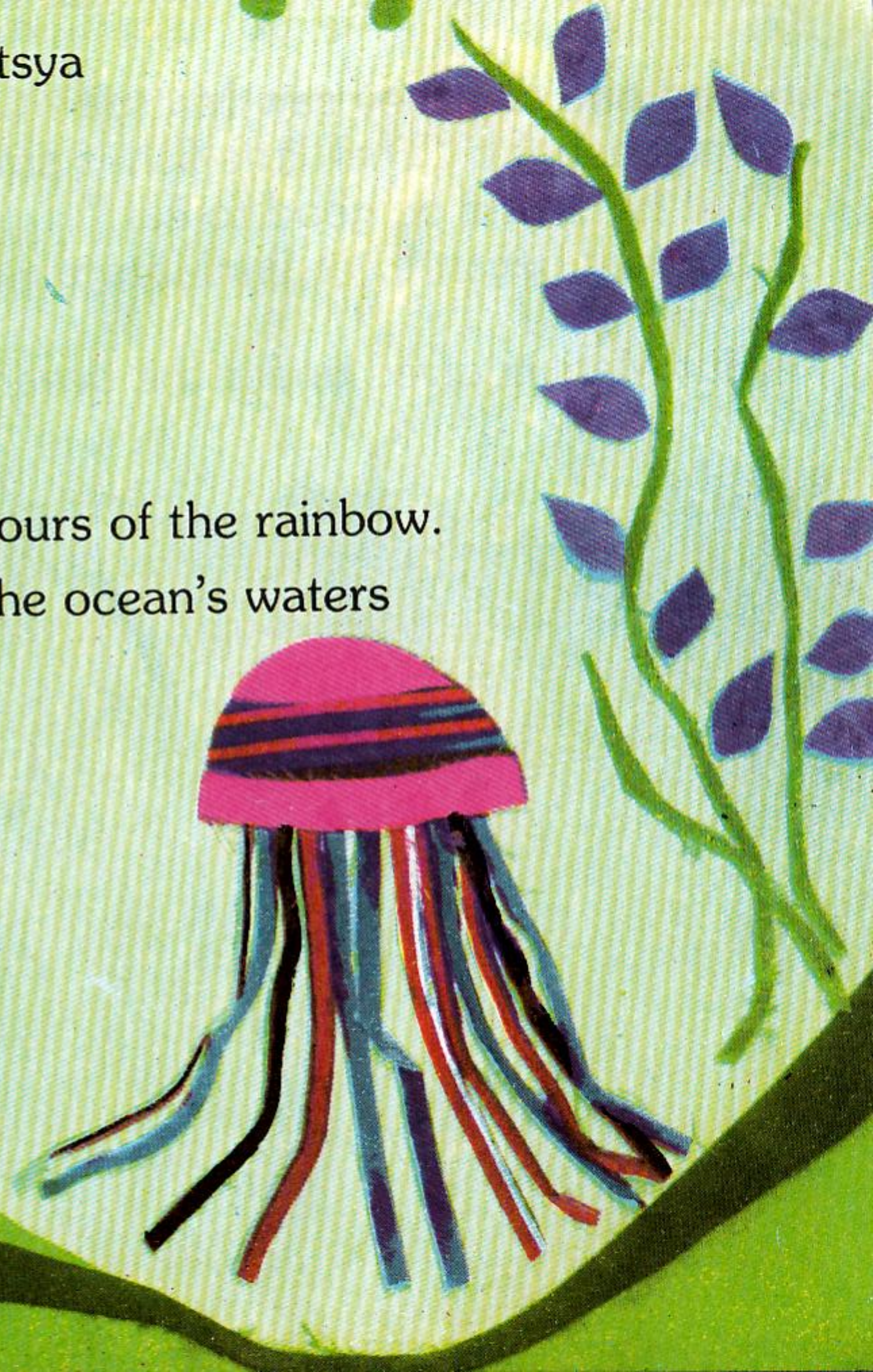
Once there was a tiny fish named Matsya
in the ocean.

Such a tiny fish
you could hardly see him.
He was as tiny as a grain of sand
—or maybe tinier.

He was tiny, yes,
but he was beautiful
and his tiny scales shone with the colours of the rainbow.

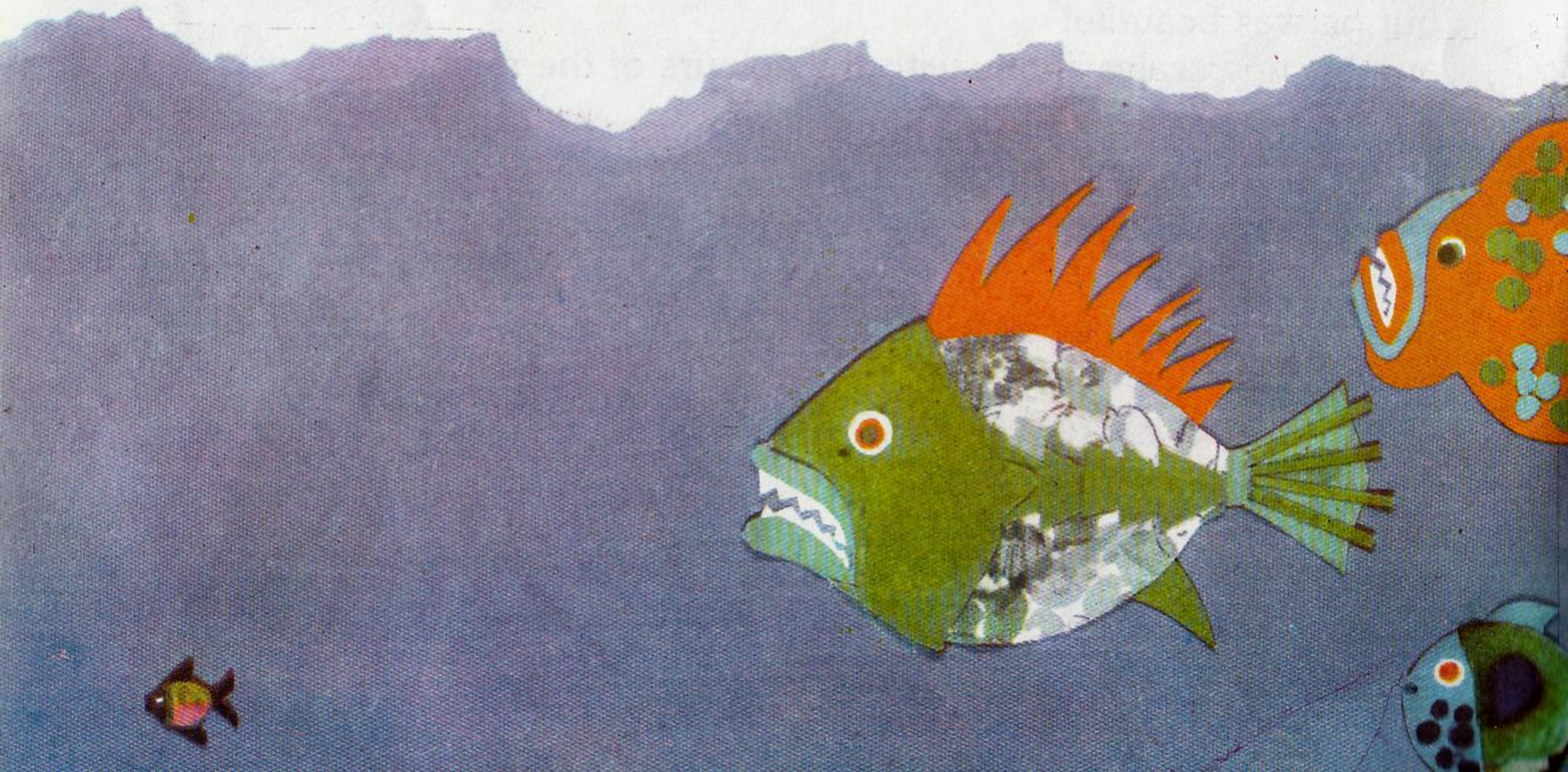
All day long Matsya played about in the ocean's waters
and at night he slept under a rock.
He was completely happy.

But not for long
there were other fish in the ocean.
Rough fish, tough fish;
fish with hungry mouths
and sharp teeth.



And one day they saw Matsya
and thought: "That little fish is smaller than a grain of sand
but he would be good to eat."
So they began to chase Matsya.

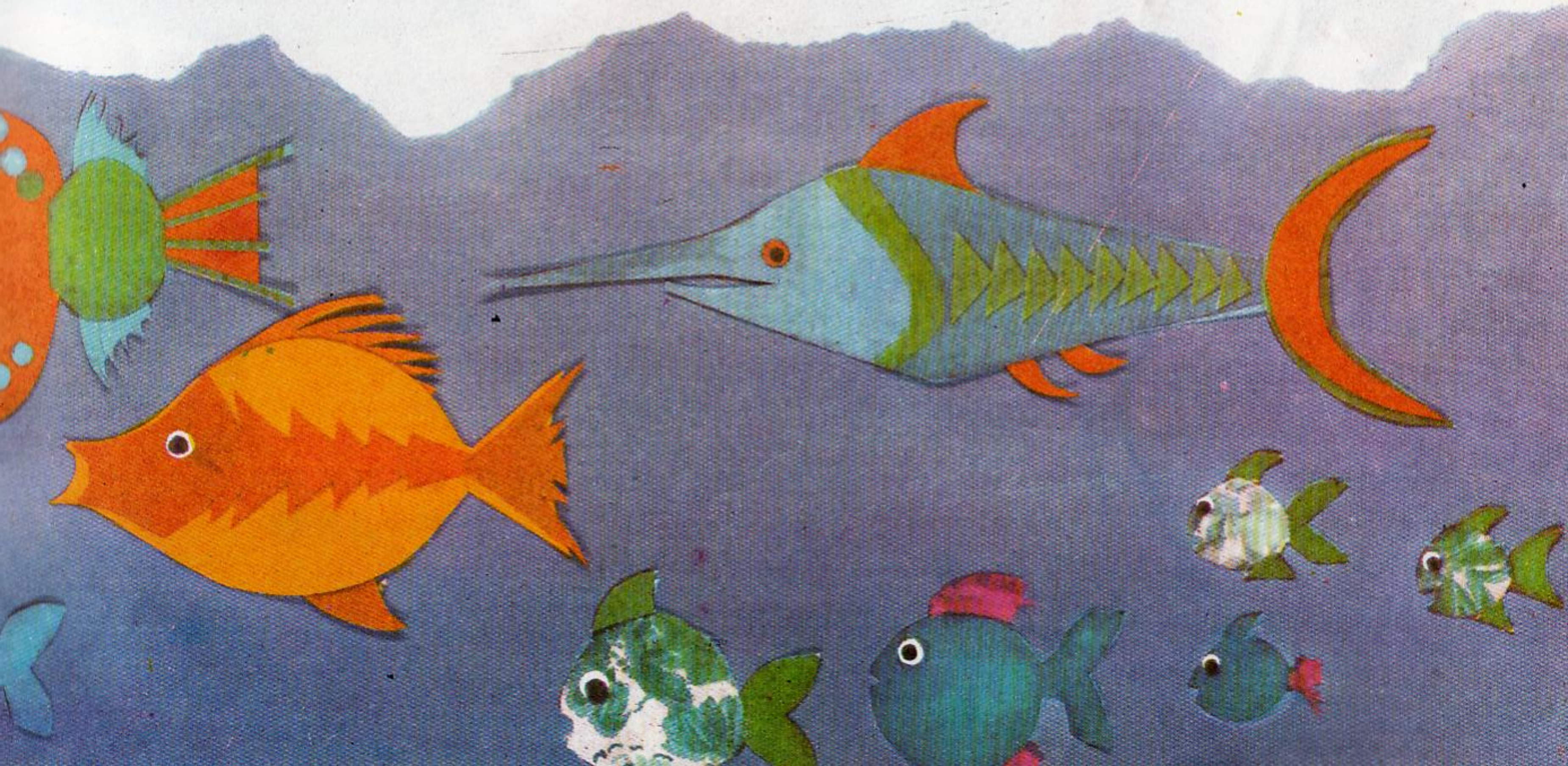
But Matsya dived under the ocean's waters and



wiggling his tiny tail
swam away from them.

He hid among the seaweeds and
under the rocks.

Once he found a hiding place right under the tummy of a big fish!

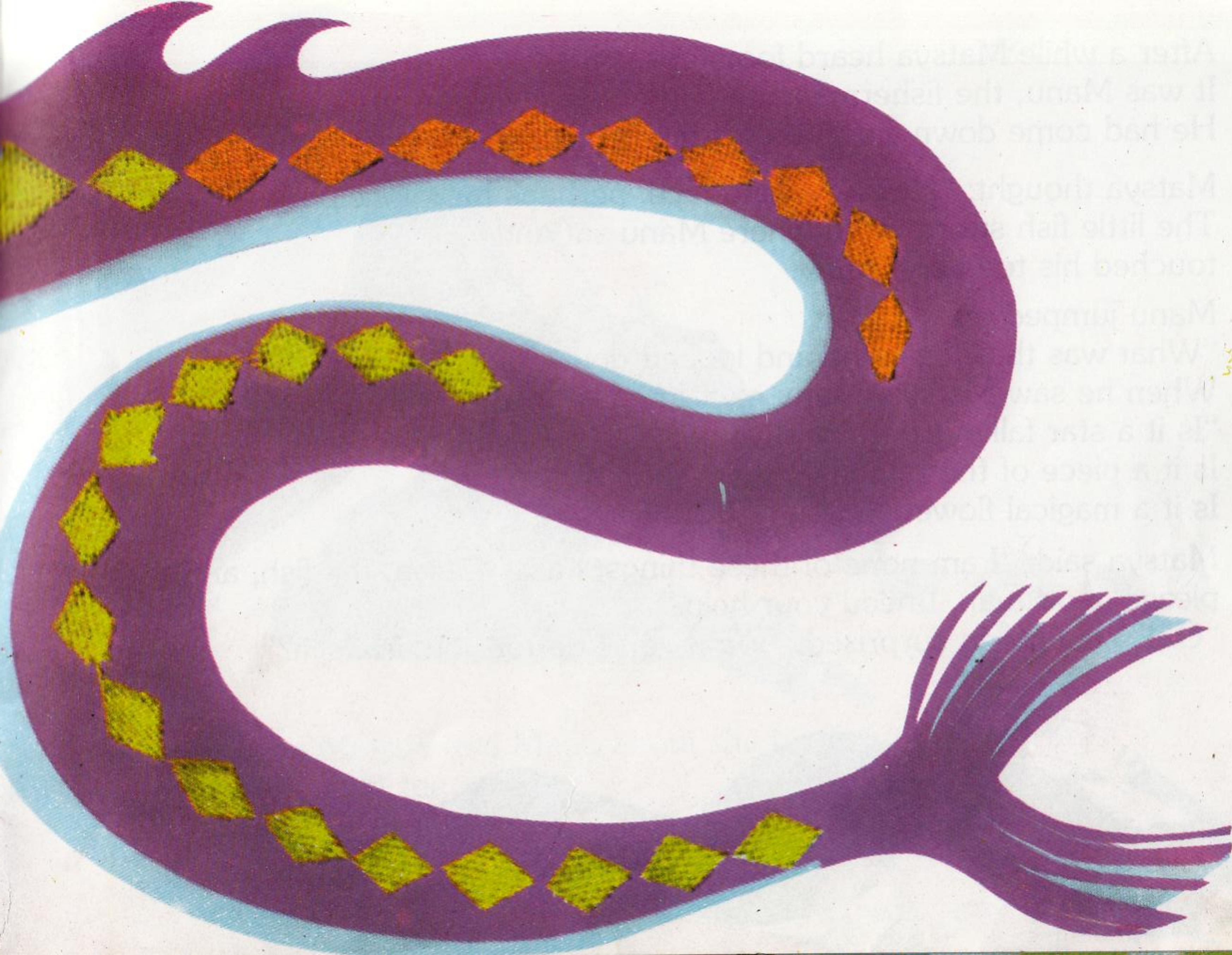




Then one day a big fish nearly caught Matsya.
The creature lay hiding behind a rock and
it swooped upon Matsya as the little fish went swimming past.
But Matsya wiggled and wriggled so hard that
he slipped out of the big fish's mouth and got away.

"What shall I do?" cried Matsya. "The big fish want to eat me up,
and I don't want to be eaten up. I want to live and play and grow."

Matsya swam and swam
until he came to the shallow waters of the ocean.
And there he waited.



After a while Matsya heard footsteps.
It was Manu, the fisherman.
He had come down early to cast his net in the ocean's waters.

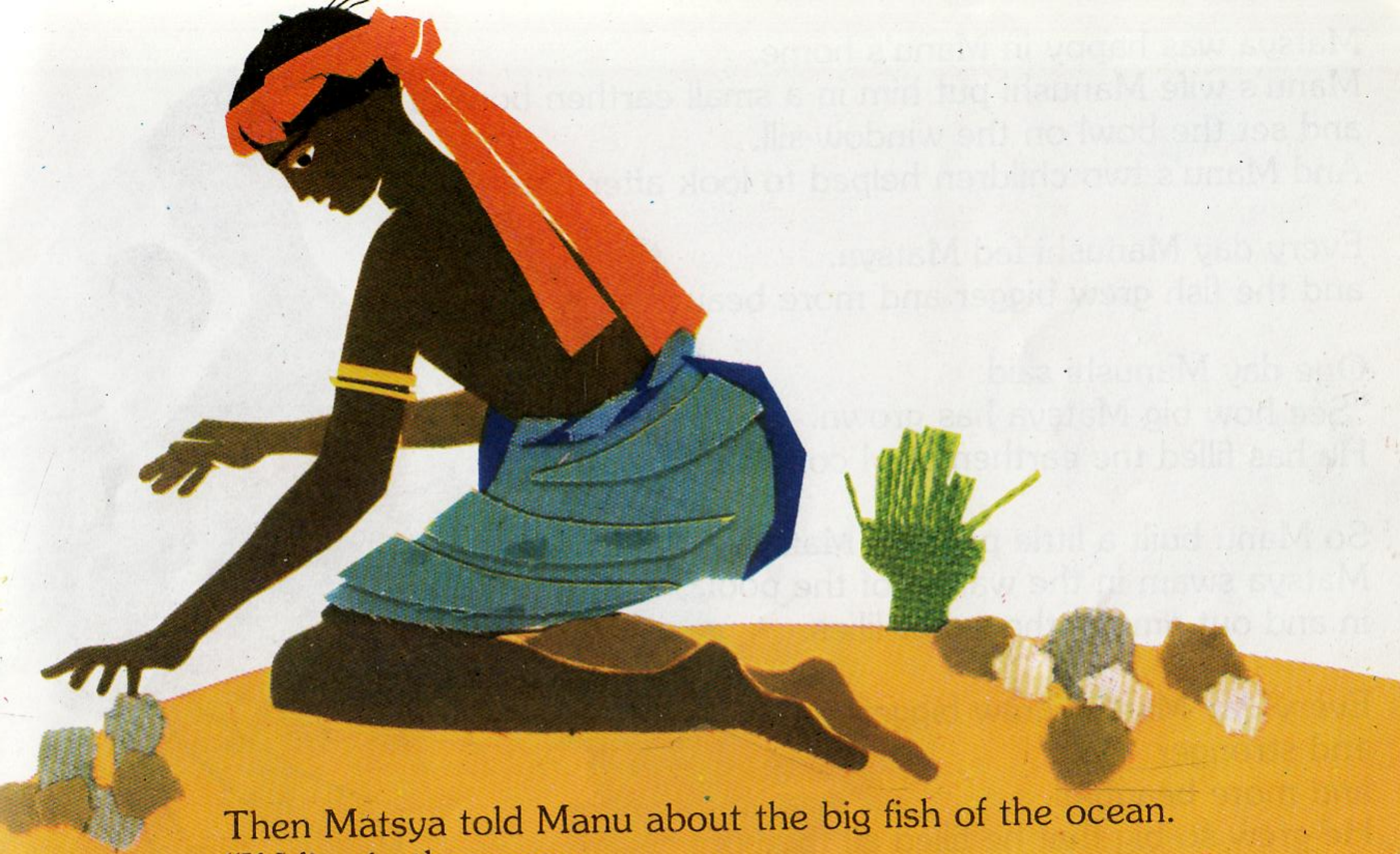
Matsya thought: "He has a kind face, perhaps he will help me."
The little fish swam up to where Manu sat and
touched his toe very lightly.

Manu jumped up.
"What was that?" said he and looked down.
When he saw Matsya, Manu exclaimed:
"Is it a star fallen from the sky?
Is it a piece of the rainbow?
Is it a magical flower?"

Matsya said: "I am none of these things. I am Matsya, the fish, and
please good man, I need your help."

"Oh!" said Manu surprised. "What can I do for you, Matsya?"





Then Matsya told Manu about the big fish of the ocean.
“If I live in the ocean
I will surely die!” he said.
“Oh, we must not let you die!” said Manu.
And he took the little fish to his cottage.

Matsya was happy in Manu's home.
Manu's wife Manushi put him in a small earthen bowl of water
and set the bowl on the window-sill.
And Manu's two children helped to look after him.

Every day Manushi fed Matsya,
and the fish grew bigger and more beautiful.

One day Manushi said:
"See how big Matsya has grown.
He has filled the earthen bowl completely."

So Manu built a little pool for Matsya.
Matsya swam in the waters of the pool,
in and out among the water lilies.

Every day Matsya grew bigger
and stronger
and more beautiful.
He grew so big that he filled all the pool.








Then Manushi took Matsya to a lake in the hills.
Matsya swam and played about in the lake and was happy.
“What a great, wide, wonderful world it is,” said Matsya.
There were other fish in the lake.
But Matsya wasn’t frightened of them any more.
Matsya played with them and had fun.

Every day Manu and his family came to see Matsya.
Every day they saw him grow bigger
and stronger and more beautiful.
The fish shone now like the sun and his
colours sparkled like jewels.

Time passed.
Matsya continued to grow.
One day Matsya grew so big that the lake could not contain him.
“We shall have to put Matsya into the river,” said the younger child
“You are right,” said Manu.
“But how shall we take Matsya to the river? He is too big to carry.”



“Maybe we could dig a canal from the lake to the river,” said Manushi.
And that is what they did.

They dug a canal and the waters of the lake flowed through the canal
into the river, and Matsya swam out of the lake and into the river.

The river was deep and wide.

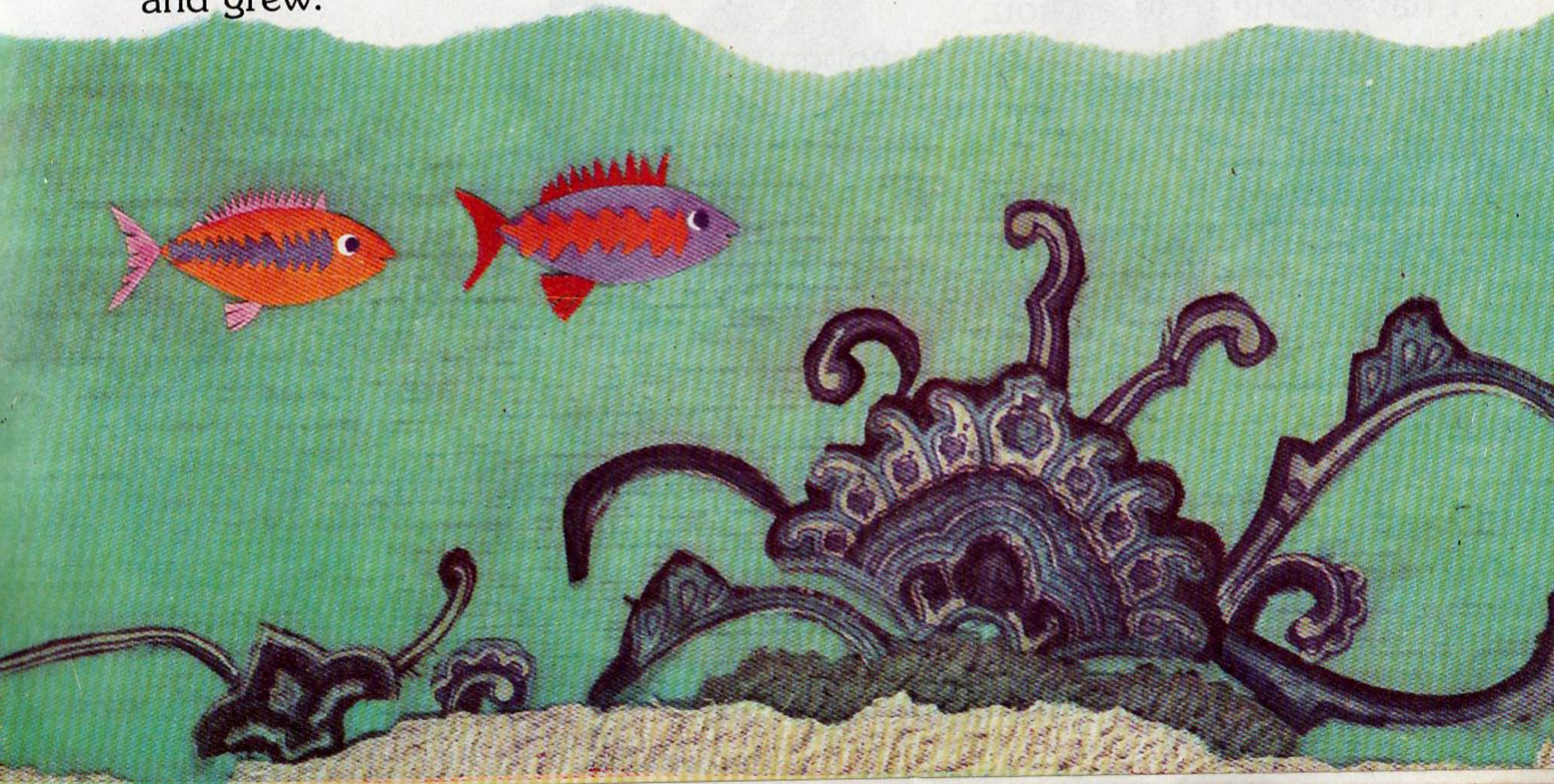
Its waters flowed from the mountains to the sea.



You couldn't see where it began and where it ended.

"Ah," said Matsya. "Here in this great river I am happy.
I have place to move and swim about and play.
I have place to grow."

And the fish swam about and played about and he grew
and grew.



One day when Manu and his family came to visit Matsya they were astonished to see how big the fish had grown. Matsya had become a huge fish. Matsya swam out of the deep waters and spoke to them.

“Listen!” said Matsya in a mighty voice.

“I have come to warn you.

Something terrible is going to happen!

This river will rise up in a mighty flood.

It will be a bigger flood than any you have ever seen.

The waters of the river will rise higher than the hills, higher than the mountains.

The sky will be dark with big, black clouds.

They will hide the sun.

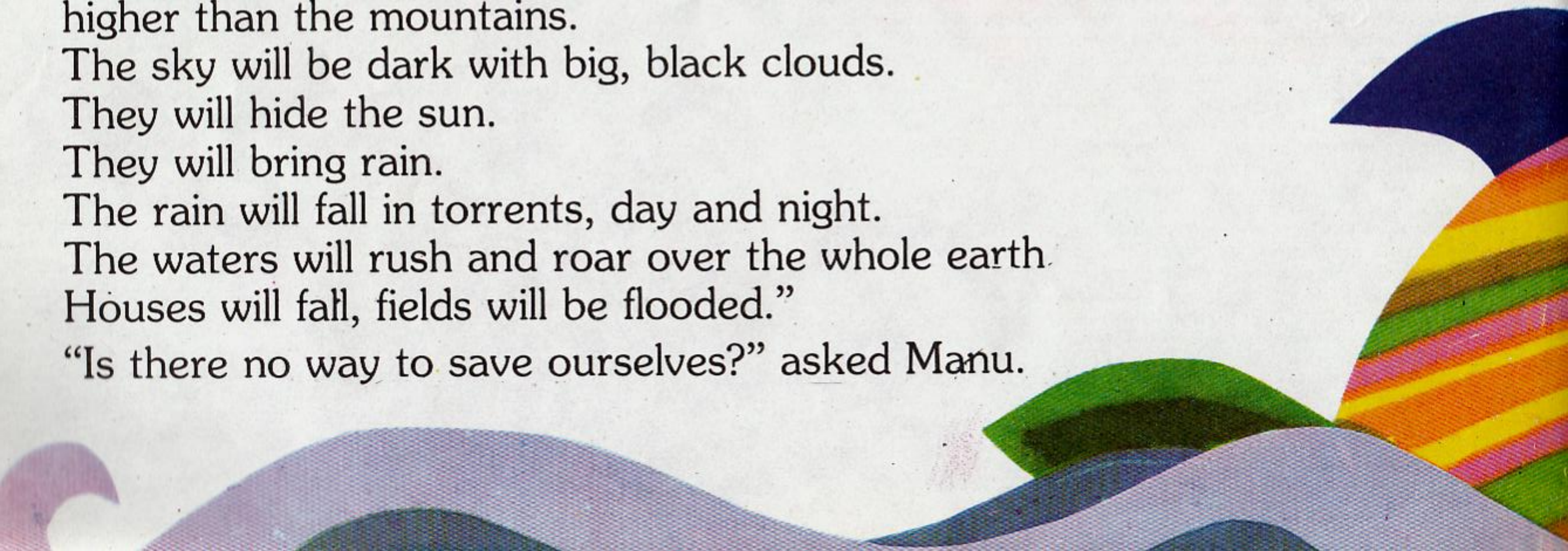
They will bring rain.

The rain will fall in torrents, day and night.

The waters will rush and roar over the whole earth.

Houses will fall, fields will be flooded.”

“Is there no way to save ourselves?” asked Manu.





"Yes," said Matsya, "you must build a house in a boat.
It must be the strongest and the best boathouse ever built."

Manu and Manushi went back to the village.

They called the villagers.

They told them what Matsya had said:

"There will be a terrible flood.

It will destroy the world and everything in it.

If we want to save ourselves

we must build houseboats for ourselves."

"Nonsense!" said the villagers.

"Every year we have a flood!

When the rains come

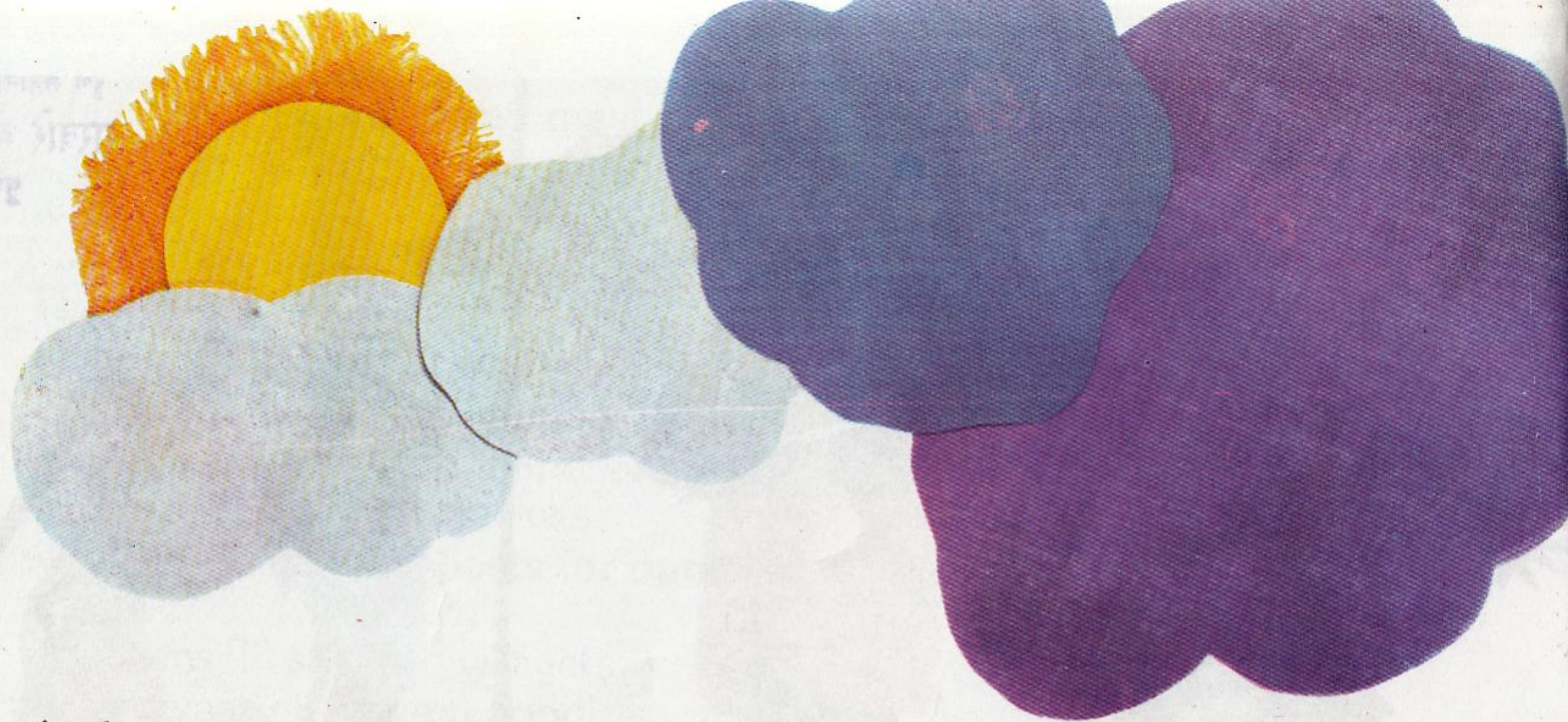
the waters fill the river.

Go away! We won't listen to your silly stories."





So Manu and Manushi left them and went into the woods.
From morning tonight they worked to build the boathouse.
Oh, it was hard work and the boathouse took many days to build.
But at last it was ready.



And one day just as Matsya had said
the sky became dark with clouds.

At first there was just one tiny cloud.

But soon bigger clouds came, and after them came more clouds,
bigger, blacker, thicker clouds.

They covered the sky and the sun's face.

Then the rain came—

at first one little drop, then more drops,

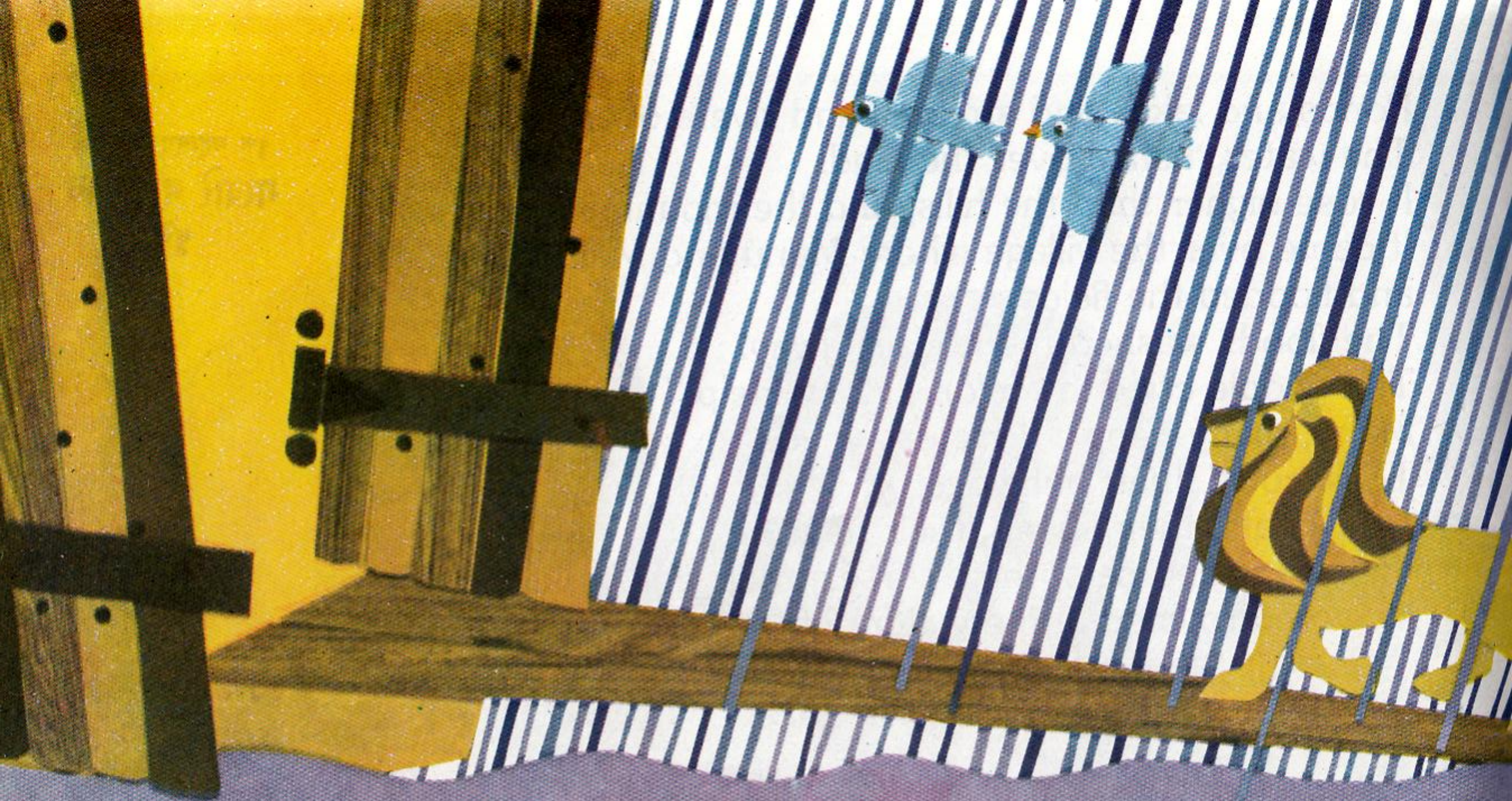


and then the drops grew bigger and BIGGER and BIGGER.
Lightning flashed. Thunder crashed.
The rain poured down,
on and on and on.



Ponds and lakes and streams and rivers overflowed.
The water rushed over the land.
It rose higher than the hills, and the mountains.
It came over the village where Manu and Manushi lived
and flooded the fields.
The floods washed the houses away.
The people cried in terror: "Help! Help!"
Many, many people were drowned.
Their cows, their buffaloes,
their goats, their sheep, their hens,
their dogs and cats, their horses, their donkeys, their parrots,
all were drowned in the waters of the terrible, terrible flood.





But Manu and Manushi and their children
had already taken shelter in their boathouse.
They sat inside it and were safe
from the wind and rain and flood.
“Open the doors of your boathouse,” cried the villager
“Please, please open the doors or we will drown.”

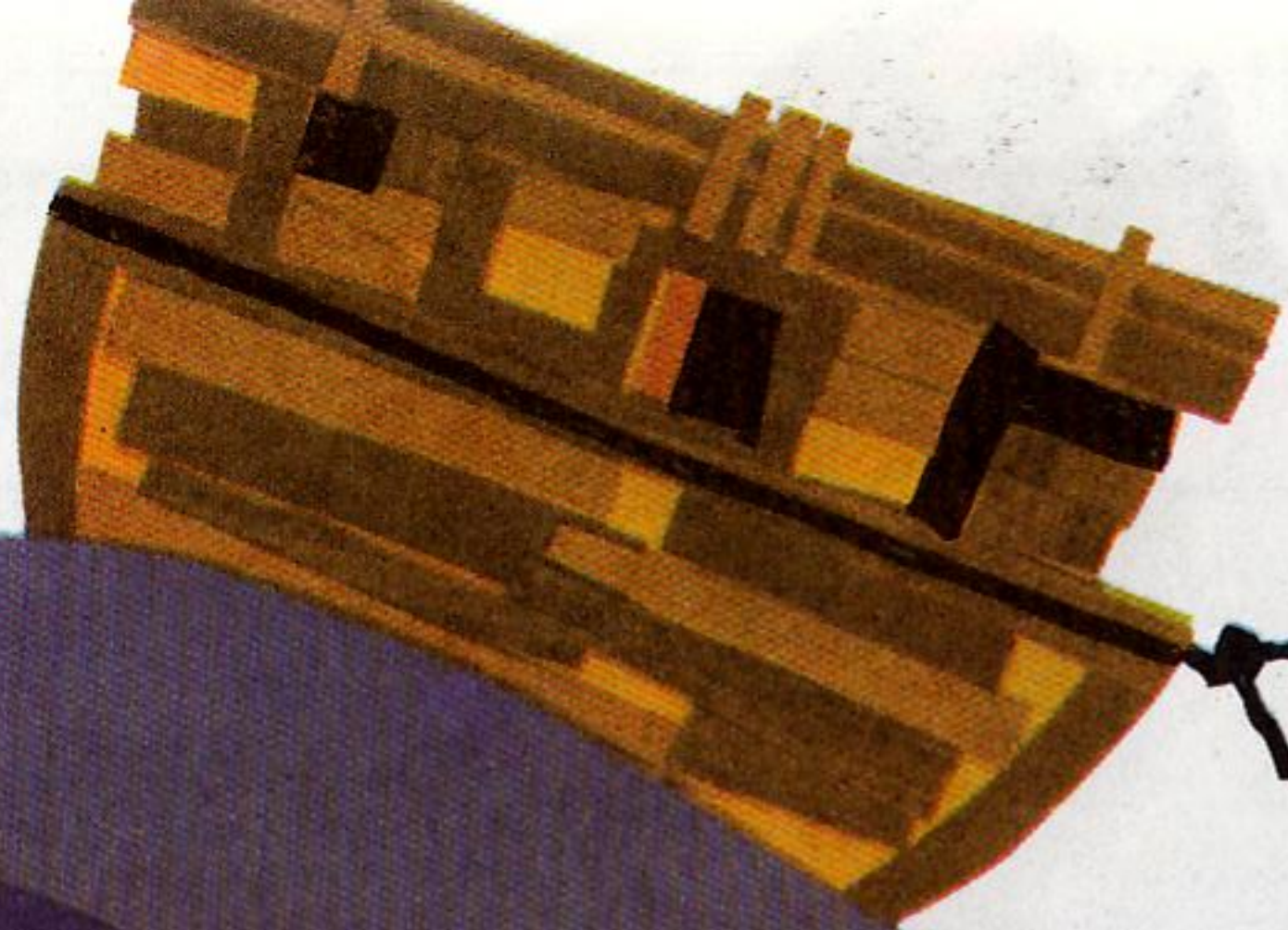


So they opened the doors and
as many people as could came into the boathouse.
Manu was just going to shut the door when,
“Let us in! Let us in!” cried the animals of the earth.
So Manu let the animals in,
as many as they could take.

The boathouse went tossing over the flood waters.
There was no land to be seen anywhere—
no villages, no towns, no cities,
no forests, no hills, no mountains.
Everything was under water and water was everywhere.







Days and weeks went by.

The boathouse was still tossing on the water.

“Our food is coming to an end,” cried the frightened people.

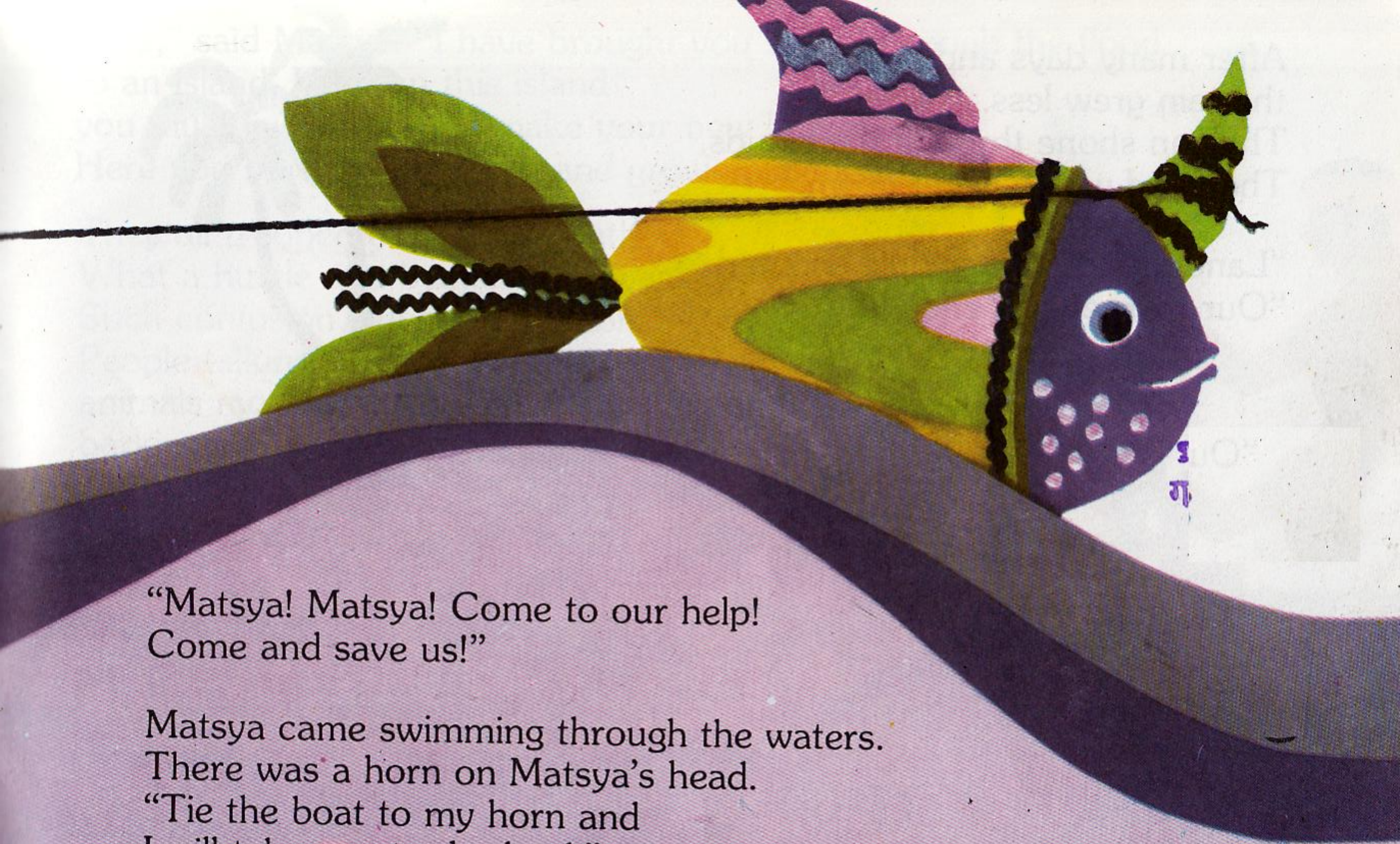
“Don’t be afraid,” Manu and Manushi said.

“One day we will come to dry land.”

“Look!” shouted the children one day. “Look! There’s an enormous fish! It is riding over the waters!”

“Why!” cried their parents. “It’s our Matsya, our fish.

Matsya’s grown bigger now than the hills and the mountains.”



“Matsya! Matsya! Come to our help!
Come and save us!”

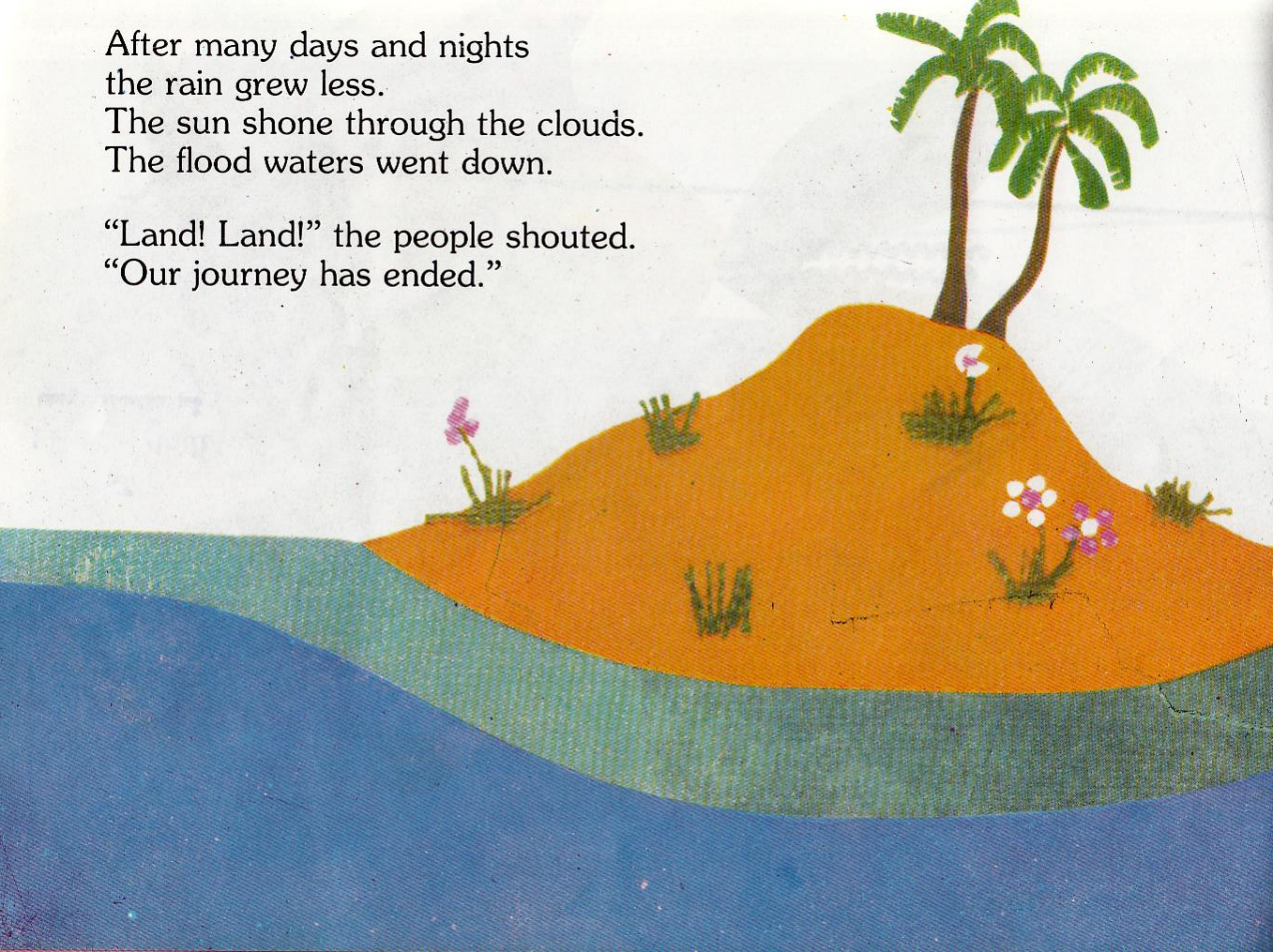
Matsya came swimming through the waters.
There was a horn on Matsya’s head.

“Tie the boat to my horn and
I will take you to dry land.”

They found great coils of rope and
the people helped to tie the boat to Matsya’s horn.

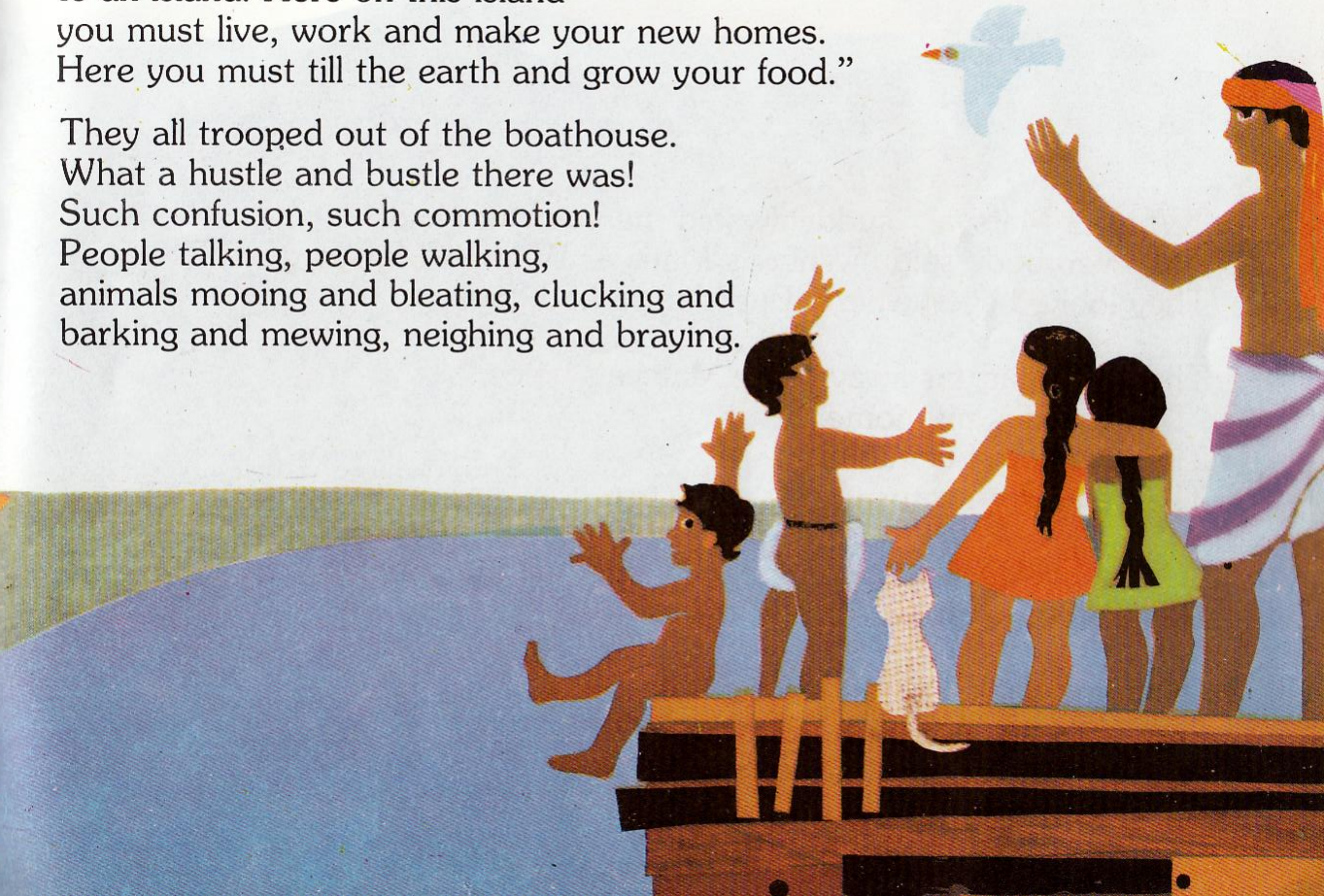
After many days and nights
the rain grew less.
The sun shone through the clouds.
The flood waters went down.


“Land! Land!” the people shouted.
“Our journey has ended.”



“Yes,” said Matsya. “I have brought you safely through the flood to an island. Here on this island you must live, work and make your new homes. Here you must till the earth and grow your food.”

They all trooped out of the boathouse. What a hustle and bustle there was! Such confusion, such commotion! People talking, people walking, animals mooing and bleating, clucking and barking and mewling, neighing and braying.





“Where’s Matsya?” suddenly said the younger child.
And everybody said: “Where’s Matsya? Where’s Matsya gone?”
They looked everywhere. But Matsya had gone.

Then from far, far away came Matsya’s voice:
“The ocean is my home.
That is where I came from
That is where I return.”

“Come back Matsya, come back,” cried all the people.
“Do not leave us beautiful Matsya.”

“I’ll come back,” called Matsya’s voice,
“but not now, not now, not now,
for now it is time for me to return
to my home in the ocean.”





Rs 19.00

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